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### The Three P's

"Well! Then! Who do we have here?" Turning a corner onto the sunporch, he played the upbeat, young doctor but the "patient" proved to be a cauliflower sunk into the canvas seat of a wheelchair. *C. Flower*, noted the chart hanging from a chrome arm.

"Is this the joke on the new hand?" he sniffed to the head nurse as they stood in her airless cubby. "Not exactly," she reached slightly into his jacket. "This belt buckle is so unusual. Difficult to undo?"--an old-fashioned nurse featuring starch noises when she moved.

Marched he to the hospital administrator, a person roundly comfortable without him. "Ah yes, you've gone and discovered *C. Flower* then? She has been a model patient." He managed it all in a sigh.

"She?"

"We've gotten used to referring to her as a she. One thinks of cauliflowers as feminine, don't you think?" He had never thought about it and didn't now, the memory of nurse's noisy moves still fuzzing him. "Well now!" the administrator brightened, "You'd like an explanation!" In an immediate slash of dusty sunlight, his granny glasses opaqued on a pink face.

"I insist!"

"Of course, since she's your patient. Your others will be much more nettlesome, believe me."

"I'm not trained to treat..."

"Of course not. But, then again, we're not trained to do much that the world requires, are we?--the newer things especially. There's a...personal world, a professional world, and a political world. The three P's you might say."

His own personal world revealed itself in color photos of

three little girls--the doctor could see half of the administrator's soft facial features in each. One black and white picture presented a woman--wife, the doctor deduced--greeting a robed African, she, strangely, with half the administrator's face too, plus strain.

"My wife is also a physician. We are physicians. Like you." Behind the blank glasses no eyes were evident; the young doctor did not answer.

"At any rate, C. Flower, was born in response to the political. As a kind of joke at first. You see we have the minimal number of patients under state regulations. If we lose one, another must come in. Last month we lost one, and had no one to admit. They would close us down!" He waved a fat arm expansively, as if to include his wife and daughters among employees.

So, we admitted C. Flower. She's temporary-- 'll be chucked into the dumpster at the appropriate moment. At that point in time, I'll put her down as transferred to a private convalescent home," he sagely nodded to himself, his glasses only somewhat gummy in the office's quick darkening slumbry gray eyes now visible, questioning. "Will it rain or what?"

"No. Not supposed!" he snapped, sulked, recovered. "She's my...patient! How can I partake in such an an an im...a crooked game?"

"Do be careful, Doctor. Many have lost professional standing by being pigheaded in these or similar circumstances. I'm asking you to be a *mensch*! All life isn't diagnosis, treatment, and lab tests on stool samples."

"ComPLETely absurd! I don't BELIEVE this!"

"My young friend, every institution forces one to perform absurd tricks," he stared over prayful hands. "A kind of power dance. That is, the higher-ups conduct us with the most benign of smiles," he smiled, "and we dance. I guess it's how you use your baton in this world that counts, yes?"

"Well not me! I'm going to HAVE to write a report before..." "Don't bother. The inspector will be here in an hour or so, and want to talk to you as the new physician. *Ah if 'done 'twere best done quickly!* Everyone in the hospital, including you, out on the street! Including me--with three in college. And, God, the poor people in the kitchen! They don't just send resumes out like you can. Carlos is so proud of that cancerous Firebird!"

"No alternative! Such corruption defies everything!" "Well, many things, I'll grant you that. Uh, well, more than a few anyway." The administrator, in ritual weariness, took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes as the young doctor bolted.

That afternoon, the agrieved physician saw his clear duty as simply pointing things out to the skinny inspector-wanting to feel not responsible after that point. So on their walk to the state car, he merely stated "Before you leave I want you to meet C. Flower ."

"No thanks, I've seen enough."

"But, this is quite important."

"Hey! You're here to treat the Alzheimer's Brigade. More power to you, but I don't have to look at it and think of myself with the drool running down. No way!" The inspector would not be moved into the scenario the physician had contrived.

"But this particular patient is a cauliflower!"

"Hey! So you got a few vegetables here; I didn't know you differentiated."

"I really must insist!" "Hey, Doctor! *I'm* really Finance." And, leaning over it like a mincing question mark, he opened his laptop computer and punched in a formula which blinked on the screen. "See that? This'll show them! My invention, and the whole system's gonna eventually use it if it kills me!"

After his shift (his relief, Dr Kong, giggled yes to all his complaints) and with his head abuzz with newer strategies, he headed to nurse's cubbyhole again, beginning to consider thinking about seeing her as his sole potential ally. At the least, he hoped she'd take a few moments to listen to reason.

Oh she'd try her discrete SEXY business--he wasn't naive--it still wrinkling his mind with alarming starch: as had the inspector defensively crunched his beloved NUMBERS, and before him, the administrator dispensed SCHMALTZ.

*Personal, professional, and political* indeed!

He was fathoming, entering her atmosphere, how he'd set up again his moral heart.

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